The Daily News Digest

Tuesday, November 16, 2010

Today's Top Stories:

NM Community Braces For Coal Plant Changes – The Associated Press

Radiation in Houston's tap water, long history of contamination – KHOU TV - Houston

Homestake Mill Superfund Site Update: Plenty of Sampling, Nearby Residents Continue to Voice Concerns – Cibola Beacon

Gas well blowout in Frio Co. sends plumes of water into air – KENS 5 - Frisco

Distribution List: Al Armendariz (6RA), Larry Starfield (6RA-D), Carl Edlund (6PD), Lynda Carroll (6MD), John Blevins (6EN), Sam Coleman (6SF) and George Pettigrew (6SF-LN), Suzanne Murray (6RC), Jeannine Hale (6RA-DA), Ivan Vikin (6CI), Randy Holthaus (6IG), David Gray (6XA), Diane Taheri (6XA-D), 6XA Press Office (6XA).

DAILY NEWS DIGEST ARTICLES
November 16, 2010

Oil/Natural Gas/ Coal

Gas well blowout in Frio Co. sends plumes of water into air

KENS 5, 11/15/10

Summary: A natural gas well blew out Sunday night in Frio County, sending a plumes of water gushing into the air. A hazardous materials crew was monitoring the smelly situation Monday. A resident claims officials are evacutating a mobile home park that sits about a quarter mile from the site. A nearby resident said she heard a big boom at about 9 p.m. Sunday. The air smells like rotten eggs, Trudy Alvarez said, and although she was told at first to evacuate her home, she later was told it would be OK to stay. Gas was escaping, but it is being tested and is non-hazardous, Frio County Sheriff Lionel Trevino said.

Permitorium becoming Obama's permitgate?

St. Tammany News, 11/14/10

Summary: So the moratorium is over, drilling has resumed and business is back to normal, right? Nothing could be further from the truth. According to the Gulf Permit Index, being monitored by Greater New Orleans Inc., "Only one deep-water permit has been issued since the end of the federal moratorium. The deficit from the historical average is 4.8 permits per month, representing an 83 percent decrease in drilling activity," said Michael Hecht, president and CEO of GNO, Inc. Hecht said that since the update two weeks ago, only one shallow and one deep water permit has been issued, putting up to 30,000 Louisiana jobs at risk.

NM Community Braces For Coal Plant Changes

AP, 11/13/10

Summary: Plans to shutter part of one of the nation's largest coal-fired power plants have been hailed by the conservation community and New Mexico regulators as a victory that will lead to cleaner air for northwestern New Mexico, the Navajo Nation and three neighboring states. The problem is that environmental victory comes with economic costs, community leaders say. "The impact on our community is tremendous, all the way from the gross receipts taxes that we won't be collecting to the lost jobs," said Farmington City Councilor Jason Sandel. Arizona's largest utility company announced plans this week to close part of the Four Corners Power Plant and seek majority ownership of the plant's remaining two generating units from Southern California Edison. The decision is being driven by new federal proposals aimed at cracking down on emissions and California laws prohibiting utilities from investing in most coal-fired power plants.

Air Quality

Basin operators get reminder to prepare for new air emissions regulations

My West Texas, 11/15/10

Summary: Five months after senior management with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality came to Midland to discuss proposed changes to Permit By Rule and Standards permits, area operators got a reminder to be prepared. "There are processes and steps for operators to assess air emissions from the typical production facility," said L. Peter "Pete" Galusky, principal in the Texerra consulting firm, which has offices in Midland and Colorado Springs, Colo. In Midland to address members of the Society of Petroleum Engineers' Environmental Study Group, Galusky said he focused on the Permian Basin, "which is primarily oil production with associated gas." He said a producer's first focus should be on emissions associated with storage - flash emissions caused by a drop in pressure as oil moves through the transportation system or water levels rise, and breathing emissions from tanks that stand in the sun and respond to heating, cooling and air pressure.

Superfund

Homestake Mill Superfund Site Update: Plenty of Sampling, Nearby Residents Continue to Voice Concerns

Cibola Beacon, 11/15/10

Summary: More sampling is continuing at the Homestake Mining Company Superfund Site just north of Milan on Highway 605. Sai Appaji, the EPA's remedial project manager, reported at a community meeting on Nov. 8 that sampling started in September and will go through early next year. The goal is 1,500 samples from soil, indoor, vegetation and ground water. Samples will be compared to a "background," an area that is similar. The background site chosen is Bluewater Village. The site has been under remediation since the late 1990s. The EPA periodically gives updates to residents on the project - sometimes the updates are good, sometimes they're bad, depending on the perspective.

Tribal/Environmental Justice

Supreme Court Declines Navajo Request To Review New Mexico Uranium Opinion

BNA's Daily Environment, 11/16/10

Summary: The U.S. Supreme Court Nov. 15 declined to consider a request by members of the Navajo Nation to overturn a license to mine uranium on tribal lands in New Mexico (Morris v. NRC, U.S., No. 10-368, cert. denied 11/15/10). Eastern Navajo Dine Against Uranium Mining and others had asked the Supreme Court to reverse a March 8 decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit, which upheld a license granted to Hydro Resources Inc., a non-Indian mining company, for operations in the Navajo Nation's Church Rock and Crownpoint Chapters in McKinley County, N.M.

Gulf Restoration

Court ruling halts sand project on Galveston west end beaches

AP, 11/15/10

Summary: Texas' General Land Office has canceled a $40 million beach renourishment project in Galveston because a recent state Supreme Court finding has put in question who owns the beach. Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson says a contractor was set to begin laying down sand on six miles of beach on Galveston's west end. The project was to protect the beach from erosion, an especially serious problem when hurricanes and other large storms batter the island. But the Supreme Court says the state can no longer use the line of vegetation to determine the boundary between public and private land. Patterson says the Nov. 5 ruling makes it unclear whether the stretch of beach is public or private. As a result, he says he has canceled the expensive project.

BP in the News

Ideas poured in for BP oil spill cleanup

Lafourche Parish Daily Comet, 11/15/10

Summary: As oil spewed from the BP well in the Gulf of Mexico last summer, so did ideas on how to stop it and clean it up. BP received about 123,000 ideas, 80,000 of which had to do with plugging the leak and 43,000 on ways to clean up the oil. The ideas came in crayon from 9-year-old boys, in shaky handwriting from 90-year-old men and from scientists, inventors and engineers - even actor Kevin Costner. Most of the ideas weren't workable: freeze the well into submission or bury it in a nuclear explosion. Many of the ideas had already been tried or discarded. Some of the ideas would've created other problems: dump popcorn from airplanes to soak up oil but create a tasty toxic treat for marine life.

Deal reached on blowout preventer autopsy

Fuel Fix, 11/13/10

Summary: Beginning Monday, forensic engineers will put the blowout preventer retrieved from the Deepwater Horizon through a battery of tests designed to reveal why it failed to stop gushing oil and gas at BP's Macondo well this year. A last-minute compromise among federal agencies will ensure that the Chemical Safety Board has its own representative in the testing facility, along with five other experts from BP, rig owner Transocean, blowout preventer manufacturer Cameron International, the Justice Department and the plaintiffs in a multi-district class action lawsuit tied to the oil spill.

Spill tally so far: BP has paid more than $500 million

Bloomberg, 11/12/10

Summary: BP Plc has paid the U.S. $518 million for clean-up and other efforts related to its Gulf of Mexico oil spill, congressional auditors said. The Government Accountability Office released a report today reviewing the financial risks facing the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund, which Congress authorized in 1990 — after the Exxon Valdez incident — to pay the immediate expenses of federal agencies responding to spills. An 8-cents-per-barrel petroleum tax finances the fund.

Energy/Alternative Energy

San Antonio Utility's Sustainability Report Sets a Path Toward Renewables

Solar Home & Business Journal, 11/14/10

Summary: CPS Energy, the large municipally owned utility company covering the San Antonio area, has released its first Corporate Sustainability Report, which outlines plans to develop more solar and other renewable forms of electricity. The report notes that the company has served the fast-growing San Antonio region for 150 years, and that its customers' utility bills have been among the lowest of the nation's largest cities.

City-owned utility to boost spending on electric car infrastructure

Austin American-Statesman, 11/13/10

Summary: Austin Energy could invest as much as $28 million during the next five years on public charging equipment and promotion for electric cars. The investment mirrors efforts by utilities across the state to elbow their way into the American transportation energy market. In effect, the power generating companies want to displace gasoline from a pump with electricity from a plug. Austin officials say as many as 190,000 electric-powered cars, including plug-in hybrids, could be rolling around Austin in a decade. Other studies suggest that figure is optimistic, but whatever the number, the utility officials want to make the possibility a reality.

Los Alamos scientists develop sensors, simulators that could make turbines energy-efficient, wallet-friendly for wind farmers

Santa Fe New Mexican, 11/12/10

Summary: When a turbine blade breaks, it's no easy fix. Just ask the wind-farm owner who has to front the $250,000-plus price tag for bringing in the crane — and has to shell out the additional bucks to fix or replace the blade. That's just one hurdle that keeps wind energy trailing coal in cost-effectiveness. Right now, wind costs about 5 to 8 cents per kilowatt-hour, while you can get a kilowatt-hour of coal power for about half that price. The Department of Energy's goal is to close that cost gap and increase wind power by 20 percent over the next 20 years. But Washington, D.C., isn't the only place where people are getting serious about alternative energy — a team of interdisciplinary scientists at Los Alamos National Laboratory is leading a project that could help make turbines more affordable and efficient for wind-farm owners.

Water Quality

Radiation in Houston's tap water, long history of contamination

KHOU, 11/15/10

Summary: The City of Houston is one of the only major cities in Texas with radioactive elements, like uranium and radium, present in its drinking water, according to data provided by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and internal City of Houston e-mails. The elements, which emit something known as alpha radiation, are not present in detectable amounts in Dallas, Arlington, Austin, Beaumont, San Antonio, or many other major cities in Texas. Small amounts of radioactive elements have contaminated Houston's water supply going back for as many years as the city keeps records on hand, which is presently for tests performed as far back as 1996. The problem appears to be isolated to the city's groundwater wells, which provide more than 70 million gallons a day of drinking water for Houston. Some neighborhoods in Houston depend entirely on groundwater wells, while the majority of the city depends on water that is a mixture of surface water and groundwater.

Erin Brockovich returns to address residents affected by chromium contamination

My West Texas, 11/15/10

Summary: More than a year after her first visit to Midland, environmental activist Erin Brockovich will return Thursday to address those affected by chromium contamination in south Midland County. Hexavalent chromium was first discovered in April of 2009 at more than 50 times the acceptable federal levels in a water well near West County Road 112. Brockovich visited Midland in June of 2009 to speak with residents and said then the water she found in Midland County was eerily similar to the water in the Hinkley, Calif., case that made her famous. A movie starring Julia Roberts was released in 2000 based on Brockovich's investigation of the site. She will speak at 7 p.m. Thursday at the Midland Center, 105 North Main St.

Pesticides/Herbicides

Herbicides and Their Dangers – An Overview

Houston, 11/13/10

Summary: Herbicides are chemicals used to kill weeds and unwanted plants. Most people are unaware of the dangers they pose, which are many. Professional farmers and vegetable gardeners commonly use herbicides to rid their crops of unwanted plants and weeds. The USDA studied thousands of samples of fruits and vegetables available for purchase in 1995 and detected the residue of more than 65 pesticides

Other

City seeks reality show participants; Channel 6 to showcase families cutting back waste

KXAN, 11/15/10

Summary: In honor of America Recycles Day, the City of Austin's Solid Waste Services Department announced Monday the search for four Austin families to participate in a new reality-show style competition called "Dare to Go Zero." Tasked with going Zero Waste, the selected families will learn how to reduce the amount of waste they generate while participating in challenges throughout a five-week period. The family with the largest percentage of "waste loss" will be the winner and will receive a grand prize. The grand prize and selection of families will be announced in January 2011. The families will be filmed for a five-week period, and episodes will air on the City's Channel 6 and YouTube channels. "This is a great chance for Austinites to learn from other Austinites. Dare to Go Zero will allow people to see how to put Zero Waste ideas into practice and truly reduce their waste stream," said Bob Gedert, SWS Director.

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Gas well blowout in Frio Co. sends plumes of water into air

by Nadia Ramdass and KENS 5 staff

Bio | **Email**

Posted on November 15, 2010 at 11:40 AM

Updated yesterday at 7:07 PM

A natural gas well blew out Sunday night in Frio County, sending a plumes of water gushing into the air. A hazardous materials crew was monitoring the smelly situation Monday.

Officials are asking residents of a Pearsall mobile home park to voluntarily evacutate the area that sits about a quarter mile from the site.

A nearby resident said she heard a big boom at about 9 p.m. Sunday. The air smells like rotten eggs, Trudy Alvarez said, and although she was told at first to evacuate her home, she later was told it would be OK to stay.

Gas was escaping, but it is being tested and is non-hazardous, Frio County Sheriff Lionel Trevino said.

The hazmat crew is working on stopping the flow and capping it, but there was no estimate on how long that might take.

The incident closed a three-mile stretch of lightly traveled FM 1581.

There were no injuries reported.

Add another comment

Permitorium becoming Obamaâ€™s permitgate?

By Debbie Glover
St. Tammany News

So the moratorium is over, drilling has resumed and business is back to normal, right?

Nothing could be further from the truth.

According to the Gulf Permit Index, being monitored by Greater New Orleans Inc., “Only one deep-water permit has been issued since the end of the federal moratorium. The deficit from the historical average is 4.8 permits per month, representing an 83 percent decrease in drilling activity,” said Michael Hecht, president and CEO of GNO, Inc.

Hecht said that since the update two weeks ago, only one shallow and one deep water permit has been issued, putting up to 30,000 Louisiana jobs at risk.

Despite not being affected by the federal moratorium, shallow-water permit issuance is also well below the historical average of 7.1 permits per month. Over the past three months, only 3.7 shallow-water permits have been issued each month. The 3.4 permit deficit represents a 48 percent decrease in drilling activity.

Raw data on number of permits issued each month is taken from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement, BOEMRE, Web site. Hecht said that his group would continue to monitor the situation and give updates every two weeks. Congressman Steve Scalise expressed frustration in a press release Friday about the lack of action and the ongoing permitorium, or moratorium on drilling permits, which, according to him, “still exists with no end in sight.”

According to Scalise, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar “emphatically declared an end to the moratorium on Oct. 12,” stating that “we are open for business” and “we will be taking applications for drilling in the deep water.”

Scalise said that if that were the case, pending drilling permits should have been considered and approved or rejected by now. Instead, Scalise said the permits “remain in limbo, leaving our domestic energy industry, along with thousands of families throughout the Gulf, hanging in the balance.”

The 30 rigs that were safely drilling in the Gulf at the time the moratorium was put in place still remain idle along with their workforce and support infrastructure. Scalise said that with no end in sight, the energy exploration and production in the Gulf will end for good ending our energy independence, creating disaster for Gulf states’ economies and forcing the U. S. to rely even more heavily on foreign countries to meet our counrtry’s energy needs.

Scalise said, “Enough is enough. People in Louisiana and throughout the Gulf a re suffering and the future of our country’s energy independence and security is being jeopardized. We must end this permitorium and the administration must do its part by laying out a clear path that allows permits to be issued using safer standards that quickly get people back to work.” He concluded the release by stating, “The administration needs to stop playing games with the people who work in America’s energy industry. While the moratorium was lifted one month ago, the Department of Interior is not moving forward on exploration plans and drilling applications and despite the administrations’ claims, this permitorium still wreaks havoc throughout the Gulf.”

Scalise sits on the House Subcommittee on Energy and Environment.

Nov 13, 2010 10:56 am US/Mountain

NM Community Braces For Coal Plant Changes

SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN, Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Plans to shutter part of one of the nation's largest coal-fired power plants have been hailed by the conservation community and New Mexico regulators as a victory that will lead to cleaner air for northwestern New Mexico, the Navajo Nation and three neighboring states.

The problem is that environmental victory comes with economic costs, community leaders say.

"The impact on our community is tremendous, all the way from the gross receipts taxes that we won't be collecting to the lost jobs," said Farmington City Councilor Jason Sandel.

Arizona's largest utility company announced plans this week to close part of the Four Corners Power Plant and seek majority ownership of the plant's remaining two generating units from Southern California Edison. The decision is being driven by new federal proposals aimed at cracking down on emissions and California laws prohibiting utilities from investing in most coal-fired power plants.

It's a scenario that's playing out across the country as environmentalists take aim against polluting plants with lawsuits and the federal government and states look to pass more forceful regulations for curbing greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants being pumped out by coal-fired power plants.

Nevada's Mohave Generating Station was one of the first to go at the end of 2005, Portland General Electric has plans to close Oregon's only coal plant 20 years ahead of schedule and Xcel Energy Inc. plans to retire some of its coal-fired generators to meet state requirements in Colorado.

Despite the environmental benefits of reducing emissions from coal-fired generation, financial analysts say its clear that closing coal plants and the mines that feed them will have immediate economic impacts on communities that have yet to diversify with other industries or different methods of producing electricity.

Arizona Public Service Company has said its plan for the Four Corners Power Plant, if approved by regulators, would prevent layoffs among a largely Navajo work force. Officials are hopeful any future cuts from the 550-worker roster could be obtained through attrition.

At the adjacent Navajo Mine that feeds the plant's five generators, officials also hope to absorb what will amount to a 30 percent loss in coal sales through attrition and retirements over the next couple of years.

"The jobs that they say will be lost will be those through attrition, but those are still jobs not being replaced and that's a big deal here," said Margaret McDaniel, director of the San Juan Economic Development Service.

Four Corners and the mine are two of the largest private employers in San Juan County.

Farmington Mayor Tommy Roberts said the danger is that the jobs at the plant and mine support between one and two additional jobs in the community, from contractors who sell goods or services to retail businesses and restaurants.

The Farmington City Council recently passed a resolution in support of Arizona Public Service Company renewing a lease agreement with the Navajo Nation, where the plant is located. The resolution spelled out the economic importance of the plant and the mine.

"A large reduction in quality jobs and operating expenditures benefiting the area would be a devastating blow to the economy of San Juan County and Farmington," reads the resolution, which was passed just one week before news of the planned partial closure surprised community leaders.

According to the resolution, the plant and mine feed millions of dollars into the Navajo Nation and the local community in the form of taxes and royalties. They also make large contributions to local community groups. For example, BHP Billiton, which operates the mine, contributed more than $1 million last year to San Juan United Way.

Arizona Public Service Company officials are expected to go before Farmington city councilors next week to discuss the potential impacts in more detail, Roberts said.

Navajo officials are also still researching the impacts of the planned closure on tax revenues, lease payments and royalties.

Sandel said community leaders need to start having conversations with the Arizona utility, the state government and the area's congressional representatives about what the community can do.

"You start looking at it, and it's hundreds of jobs inside of our community as well as what those jobs contribute to our local economy," he said. "I think folks need to be paying attention. That's for sure."

/ost Popular Slideshows

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- Hickenlooper Past & Present
- YouReport Photos
- When NOT To Hyphenate Your Name

Basin operators get reminder to prepare for new air emissions regulations

Posted: Monday, November 15, 2010 11:29 am | Updated: 12:51 pm, Mon Nov 15, 2010.

By Mella McEwen

Oil Editor |

Five months after senior management with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality came to Midland to discuss proposed changes to Permit By Rule and Standards permits, area operators got a reminder to be prepared.

“There are processes and steps for operators to assess air emissions from the typical production facility,” said L. Peter “Pete” Galusky, principal in the Texerra consulting firm, which has offices in Midland and Colorado Springs, Colo.

In Midland to address members of the Society of Petroleum Engineers’ Environmental Study Group, Galusky said he focused on the Permian Basin, “which is primarily oil production with associated gas.”

He said a producer’s first focus should be on emissions associated with storage - flash emissions caused by a drop in pressure as oil moves through the transportation system or water levels rise, and breathing emissions from tanks that stand in the sun and respond to heating, cooling and air pressure.

Then, he said, operators need to consider the impact of emissions of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and hazardous air pollutants (HAPs) and hydrogen sulfide emissions. “When you have to implement a flare or control H2S, that converts into sulfur dioxide, which is regulated and looks to be more regulated,” he said. He added that flaring of VOCs or HAPs can lead to smoke emissions from incomplete combustion.

“Until recently, there wasn’t a lot of scrutiny of smoke from flares and I’m guessing that will change,” Galusky said, predicting operators will have to install new equipment or retrofit their facilities.

“Smoke indicates incomplete combustion of VOCs,” he said. “In other words, smoke is bad.”

If, “or as the state does more drive-bys and increases its scrutiny of the Permian Basin, they will be looking at a smoking gun.”

Other emissions to be concerned about, Galusky said, include emission from truck loading and unloading facilities and fugitive emissions.

In addressing the study group, Galusky said his main goal was “to walk the uniformed through the process of doing an air emissions inventory of their production equipment, what data will be needed, what data will be required.”

There are, he said, different levels of effort and expense in taking an emissions inventory. One, he said, is a simple desktop model to determine which facilities need more scrutiny and might need work. An engineer, Galusky said, knowing the composition of the production and what amount is being produced, can use those two figures to give the producer a ballpark figure on emissions. “If it’s below the standards, put that data in a file and when you’re audited, you’ve done your homework.” An operator’s staff, he added, might be trained to do those desktop evaluations.

“If an operator has not done that, I’d get religion pretty quickly,” Galusky said. “The Permian Basin won’t get a pass - the train is coming. The TCEQ is lowering the baseline and many, many more facilities will be drawn into compliance requirements.”

In discussing the proposals with Permian Basin producers this summer, Mark Vickery, executive director of the TCEQ, pointed out that “We haven’t looked at this rule since 1986. Technology has made huge strides in your business and our business.”

Infrared cameras, for example, he said, have become what he called “a game-changer for us” by allowing operators and regulators to see emissions that were never before seen. That means, he said, that emissions from activity the TCEQ regulates “is higher than we thought so we’ve had to go back and work with industry on improving emission controls.” Current standards, he said, “are, in our mind, not protective.”

An operator must weigh the costs of complying with the tighter regulations versus the potential cost of not complying with the regulations, Galusky said.

“There will be costs but, if done right, those costs will be minimal,” Galusky said.

Mella McEwen can be reached at mmcewen@mrt.com.

HOMESTAKE MILL SUPERFUND SITE UPDATE
Plenty of sampling

By Donald Jaramillo
Beacon Publisher/Managing editor

CIBOLA COUNTY - More sampling is continuing at the Homestake Mining Company Superfund Site just north of Milan on Highway 605.

Sai Appaji, the EPA's remedial project manager, reported at a community meeting on Nov. 8 that sampling started in September and will go through early next year. The goal is 1,500 samples from soil, indoor, vegetation and ground water. Samples will be compared to a "background," an area that is similar.

The background site chosen is Bluewater Village.

The site has been under remediation since the late 1900s. The EPA periodically gives updates to residents on the project - sometimes the updates are good, sometimes they're bad, depending on the perspective.

Several residents stood up and voiced their concerns as to why Bluewater Village was chosen. "We are going to let you pick a bad background," Candace Head-Dylla told Appajii.

The project manager said Bluewater is a good natural site. "It has not been impacted the way the mines and the mills at Homestake have," he told Head-Dylla. "The geology and structures are similar."

Another resident informed Appaji that the structures are very different in age. "Bluewater Village, you're looking at early 1900 homes while at Homestake are no homes older that 50 years," Joe Chavez told Appaji.

Appaji did note that the agencies are looking for other background sites.

The Superfund site includes the uranium mill site and the affected portions of the underlying groundwater acquifers. The mill processed ore from numerous mines in the Grants Mineral Belt until mining activity stopped in 1983. It was in operation from 1958 until 1990. The mill was decommissioned and demolished during 1993 to 1995.

Homestake was added to the National Priorities List in 1983.

Currently, the EPA and the New Mexico Environmental Department are conducting a series of multi-media sampling at the site on radon - indoor and outdoor. Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that is odorless and tasteless. It is formed from the radioactive decay of uranium.

Uranium is found in small amounts in most rocks and soil. It slowly breaks down to other products such as radium, which breaks down to radon. There is concern from homeowners who live just outside the old mill's property that there may be possible higher than normal radon readings at and near Homestake. The concern is that radon enters the air from the soil from past uranium mines. Some of the radon will move to the surface and enter the air. According to the Department of Health, radon daughters attach to dust and other particles in the air. It also moves from the soil and enters the groundwater.

Exposure to high levels of radon may result in an increased incidence of lung diseases such as emphysema and pulmonary fibrosis and an increased chance of lung cancer, according to the health agency.

According to Appaji and the EPA, northern New Mexico has a much higher radon rating than the national average, in particular the north central part of the state near Espanola and Los Alamos.

Appaji said his report on the sampling project could be complete by March 2011 and the complete report finished by March of 2012.

Dylla-Head ended the meeting by complimenting Appaji and his staff for making progress. Her mother, Jonnie Head, along with two others who live near the project, asked that their wells be retested soon so they can start using the well water for vegetation.

For more information on the Homestake Mining Companing Superfund Site, go to www.epa.gov/region6/superfund. The information repository for the project is at New Mexico State University-Grants' library. You can also get more information directly from Appajii at 1-214-665-3126. Or, email him at appaji.sairam@epa.gov.

Daily Environment Report™

Source: Daily Environment Report: News Archive > 2010 > November > 11/16/2010 > News > Mining: Supreme Court Declines Navajo Request To Review New Mexico Uranium Opinion

219 DEN A-2

Mining

Supreme Court Declines Navajo Request To Review New Mexico Uranium Opinion

The U.S. Supreme Court Nov. 15 declined to consider a request by members of the Navajo Nation to overturn a license to mine uranium on tribal lands in New Mexico (*Morris v. NRC,* U.S., No. 10-368, *cert. denied* 11/15/10).

Eastern Navajo Dine Against Uranium Mining and others had asked the Supreme Court to reverse a March 8 decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit, which upheld a license granted to Hydro Resources Inc., a non-Indian mining company, for operations in the Navajo Nation's Church Rock and Crownpoint Chapters in McKinley County, N.M. (*Morris v. NRC*, 598 F.3d 677, 70 ERC 1097 (10th Cir. 2010)).

The Navajo argued that the uranium mining could expose them to unhealthy levels of radiation (186 DEN A-5, 9/28/10).

As is its custom, the Supreme Court did not state any reason for denying the petition.

At issue in the case before the Tenth Circuit was whether Nuclear Regulatory Commission rules require the commission to take into account radiation from existing mining waste at a site when determining the amount of potential radiation exposure in granting a license for new mining activity at the same site.

The NRC said it did not need to consider radiation from existing waste. The Navajo argued that the rules required the commission to take existing waste into account and that if the commission had done so, it would not have approved the license for Hydro Resources.

Tenth Circuit Defers to NRC

In a 2-1 decision on March 8 the Tenth Circuit held that the Crownpoint Uranium Project could proceed even though the NRC license allowed uranium mining within the watershed that provided water for the town of Crownpoint.

Judge Carlos F. Lucero dissented from the majority opinion, writing that the operation would result in releases of gamma radiation and radon at levels above regulatory limits.

Lucero wrote that the NRC granted the license even though the mining “will ultimately produce radiation many times the permitted limit” and will expose families near the mining to “levels of radiation beyond those deemed safe by the NRC's own regulations, jeopardizing their health and safety.”

The majority opinion deferred to the NRC's interpretation of the term “licensed operation” in its regulations as meaning only new activities in removing uranium from the ground and processing it. For this reason, the Tenth Circuit ruled that 10 C.F.R. §20.1301(a)(1) did not require the mining company to count significant radioactive emissions from pre-existing mine waste on the site.

The respondents in the case were the United States and the NRC. Hydro Resources Inc. was a respondent-intervenor in the Tenth Circuit.

By Robert C. Cook

Court ruling halts sand project on Galveston west end beaches

Court ruling halts sand project on Galveston west end beaches

Associated Press

Posted on November 15, 2010 at 1:57 PM

Updated today at 2:21 PM

HOUSTON -- Texas' General Land Office has canceled a $40 million beach renourishment project in Galveston because a recent state Supreme Court finding has put in question who owns the beach.

Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson says a contractor was set to begin laying down sand on six miles of beach on Galveston's west end. The project was to protect the beach from erosion, an especially serious problem when hurricanes and other large storms batter the island.

But the Supreme Court says the state can no longer use the line of vegetation to determine the boundary between public and private land. Patterson says the Nov. 5 ruling makes it unclear whether the stretch of beach is public or private. As a result, he says he has canceled the expensive project.

Add another comment

Ideas poured in for BP oil spill cleanup

JULIE SCHMIT
USA TODAY

Published: Monday, November 15, 2010 at 10:16 a.m.

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BP received about 123,000 ideas, 80,000 of which had to do with plugging the leak and 43,000 on ways to clean up the oil. The ideas came in crayon from 9-year-old boys, in shaky handwriting from 90-year-old men and from scientists, inventors and engineers - even actor Kevin Costner.

Most of the ideas weren't workable: freeze the well into submission or bury it in a nuclear explosion. Many of the ideas had already been tried or discarded. Some of the ideas would've created other problems: dump popcorn from airplanes to soak up oil but create a tasty toxic treat for marine life.

AP Photo/Patrick Semansky

In a Sept. 4, 2010 file photo, The Transocean Development Driller II, left, which is assisting in the drilling of the Deepwater Horizon relief well, floats near support vessels on the Gulf of Mexico near the coast of Louisiana. The federal government has set up a security zone around the wreckage site of the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig, which lies on the sea floor about 50 miles southeast of the Louisiana coast after it exploded and sank in April, leading to the massive BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.The Justice Department said Wednesday, Oct. 27, 2010 that the zone extends 750 feet in all directions from the rig and its debris field.

But more than 100 ideas were good enough to be tested, and more than two dozen were deployed to help clean up the oil. While there were no magic bullets buried in the entrepreneurial surge, there were improvements to existing cleanup technologies. They'll improve the industry's ability to respond to future spills, given new skimmers to scoop oil, new boom to sop it up, new equipment to clean beaches and other technologies, BP and others say.

"If there's anything good to come out of this spill, that'll be it," says Hunter Rowe, a BP senior manager who has worked since May on vetting the submissions. "We were hoping for the breakthrough, the silver bullet. None came," Rowe says. Instead, people made "incremental improvements," he says.

That's typical for the oil spill response industry, which has long been starved for research funding. Federal funding for oil spill response research was cut in half between 1993 and 2008, falling to $7.7 million in fiscal year 2008, data from the Congressional Research Service show. That occurred despite calls for more research after the Exxon Valdez spill in 1989 - the most notorious U.S. oil spill before BP's.

"We were still using the same techniques on the BP spill as we did with the Exxon Valdez," says Bob Deans of the Natural Resources Defense Council. "That's what angered people."

Douglas Helton of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration testified at a congressional hearing last year that oil spill research in the private and public sectors had declined, in part, because larger spills had become less frequent.

As a result, there's little incentive for companies to invest in potentially expensive products that serve as the equivalent of a "seat belt," Costner testified at a

congressional hearing in June. He invested $20 million in an oil-water separator that grabbed his attention after the Exxon Valdez spill. BP leased 32 of the machines, but only after the spill and after facing a firestorm of public scorn.

"In the past, the whole effort for the oil companies centered . . . (on) preventing a spill," says Bruce Bullock, director of the Maguire Energy Institute in Dallas. "Hopefully, this event has changed that, and companies will think about prevention, containment and cleanup."

The ideas came to BP from more than 100 countries. At the peak, about 4,000 a day poured in via e-mail, websites, BP's call-in center and even command posts set up amid Louisiana's marshes and Florida's beaches.

"I had 50 nutcases a day walk through the door," says David Kinnaird, a BP project manager who helped coordinate BP's response from a Louisiana command center.

But Kinnaird saw something workable from Scott Smith, who marched into the command center as the spill unfolded.

Smith's company, the Massachusetts-based Cellect Technologies, makes a foam, Opflex, that repels water but absorbs oil. Previously used in the medical, construction and other fields, Smith brought it to the Gulf and "spent days living with fishermen" trying to get his foam into the water.

All sorbent-boom manufacturers claim that their products repel water. But sooner or later, they don't, Kinnaird says. BP's tests found that Opflex went weeks without absorbing water. When oiled, it could be wrung out and reused. It's also biodegradable, Kinnaird says. Traditional absorbent boom often ends up in landfills as hazardous waste.

"This was completely different from anything I'd seen," Kinnaird says. Through the spill, BP bought 2 million square feet of Opflex, which can be in pads, pompoms and sausage-like boom. Overall, more than 11 million feet of boom was deployed in the spill.

The best ideas

Most often, the best new ideas identified by BP came from entrepreneurs like Smith - not conglomerates.

Greg Huntsman and Tim Pedigo, two Missouri real estate developers, had spent 18 months "sitting on our hands," Huntsman says, as their business withered with the recession. Then the oil started spewing, and a global nightmare - and moment of opportunity - arose.

Pedigo called a distant relative (his nephew's wife's dad) who sold boom to sop up oil. The partners headed to the Gulf "following the money," Huntsman says.

After watching cleanup crews spray oil off boom stacked on slippery wooden pallets, Pedigo thought: "I can automate this."

He sketched the design for the Boom Blaster, a car-wash-like contraption to clean boom, a task typically done by hand with hoses. Two childhood buddies, who own a car wash manufacturing plant in Missouri, built it.

The blaster cleaned six times as much boom per person than if the work were done by hand, BP says. "It was kind of a cocktail napkin sketch," Pedigo says.

Lee Dragna, 37, sketched his idea for a supersize skimmer, The Big Gulp, while in a La-Z-Boy recliner watching TV. "I kept thinking, 'It can't be this easy,' " says Dragna, who's president of barge builder Lad Services in Morgan City, La.

Dragna attached skimmers to the front of a barge to suck in oil and water. He tested a prototype in his pool. BP says the football-field-size skimmer collected 10 times more oil a day than many smaller and conventional skimmers.

The inspiration for The Big Gulp? Dragna's 10-year-old son, Andrea. He was miffed because he couldn't fish because of the spill. "He said, 'Dad, you can fix anything. You can fix this. Just try,' " Dragna says.

Other entrepreneurs likewise played off their strengths.

Mike Halloran, 46, who sold lawn-mowing equipment in Chicago, watched the spill on TV and recalled a contraption used to clean beaches in Spain. He tracked down the device and hit the road for the Gulf, planning to attach it to a two-wheel, self-propelled tractor made by lawn-mower company Gravely.

"We can have a snow blower on the front one day, clean a parking lot with a sweeper the next and then clean tar balls off the beach," Halloran says.

The beach cleaner lifts the sand and shakes it. Clean sand falls to the beach through a screen. A hopper traps bigger tar balls. The machine cleans a half-acre beach in 60 minutes vs. four hours for a 10-person crew with shovels and bags - the most-often-used beach-cleaning method, Halloran says. BP put 10 of the machines to work and found it good for use in small areas.

For many of the entrepreneurs, patience was a must. The Massachusetts-based MicroSorb Environmental Solutions, which makes what it says is a safe, hydrocarbon -eating microbe, reached out to BP in April, shortly after the spill began, to get its product into the Gulf. Last month, BP began the first tests on some of the 200 microbe proposals it received, Rowe says.

"We said three months ago that (microbes) should be tested," says Billy Nungesser, the president of Plaquemines Parish, La., and a frequent BP critic. "We're a day late and a dollar short," Nungesser says.

Most people, after submitting ideas to BP, waited weeks or months just to get a rejection.

"In June, we couldn't keep up," says Michael Cortez, who also works on BP's technologies team and who, like Rowe, is a BP retiree who returned to help with the spill. By July, BP had 100 people working on the ideas.

The one that stopped the flow of oil was a cap that was placed over the well in July. That solution originated from BP engineers, the company says. But hundreds, if not thousands, of similar ideas came from the public, Rowe says.

Despite the chaos, "We didn't miss anything great," Rowe says.

Others aren't so sure. InnoCentive, an Internet-based network that links scientists, engineers and others around the world, put out a call for solutions, too. It got more than 2,500 submissions. BP never tapped the resource, saying there were too many legal issues, says InnoCentive CEO Dwayne Spradlin.

"The notion that we weren't using all the tools we had is incredible to me," Spradlin says. "The world deserves better."

Get rich quick?

No one is likely to get rich from any of their new products. BP has spent $11 billion on spill response so far. But because bigger spills are rare, there's only so much of a market for new products. Finding customers beyond BP has been tough, the entrepreneurs say.

From the Gulf, Smith took Opflex to China and demonstrated it for government officials after an oil pipeline blast there. He hopes to sell Opflex to spill response contractors in the U.S., too. But he fears they won't buy it because they may make more money deploying traditional boom. "They don't necessarily want to see a product that's reusable," Smith says.

The Boom Blaster was packed up and returned to Missouri. The partners are chasing oil producers in Brazil, oil spill response firms and the U.S. Coast Guard, which often deals with boom, Huntsman says.

Dragna says he's recouped his more than $1 million investment in The Big Gulp from contracts with BP. But he's yet to find another customer. One oil spill response contractor told Dragna the barges were too pricey to have on standby, Dragna says.

He hopes to entice oil companies to together pay a standby fee. In July, several oil companies led by ExxonMobil did something similar when they pledged $1 billion to build a system, deployable within 24 hours, to seal a blown deep-water well.

The Obama administration has asked for an increase of $8.6 million for fiscal 2011 for oil spill research funding. That's on top of $6.3 million for fiscal year 2010. Congress has not yet acted on the request. Also, federal legislation has been proposed to require agencies to establish processes to evaluate and deploy cleanup technologies. But only one of the bills specifies funding - and at not more than $5 million a year.

For now, BP says it'll continue to test and develop the ideas it collected. The team has shrunk to 14. Along with the 100 tested ideas, BP says an additional 400 submissions need further evaluation but that some may be feasible.

Leaders in the industry fear progress will stall once major spills fade from the news.

"There will be a strong focus for some years . . . but in the absence of a significant (spill) for an extended period, apathy will fall in place," says Jim O'Brien, founder of O'Brien's Response Management, BP's top management contractor for the spill.

Deal reached on blowout preventer autopsy

Saturday, November 13, 2010 at 11:45 AM by jenniferdlouhy in **General**, **Gulf oil disaster**, **regulation**

Beginning Monday, forensic engineers will put the blowout preventer retrieved from the Deepwater Horizon through a battery of tests designed to reveal why it failed to stop gushing oil and gas at BP's Macondo well this year.

A last-minute compromise among federal agencies will ensure that the Chemical Safety Board has its own representative in the testing facility, along with five other experts from BP, rig owner Transocean, blowout preventer manufacturer Cameron International, the Justice Department and the plaintiffs in a multi-district class action lawsuit tied to the oil spill.

The final deal puts an end to weeks of fighting between the CSB and the joint investigation team from the Coast Guard and the Interior Department over access to the testing — though neither side was celebrating Saturday.

CSB's managing director, said the board would sign the testing agreement drafted by the joint investigative team and would be present when testing gets under way despite "significant" and unresolved concerns about access.

Horowitz said major remaining issues "include the lack of independent photography" during the testing and "excessive restrictions on personnel in the testing area." Additionally, Horowitz said, there is no "appropriate" process for resolving disputes among federal agencies involved in the testing.

But, in a concession by the joint investigation team, the final deal secured CSB's space at the testing facility and allowed the board to put an investigator or other expert of its own choosing in the seat when the examination is under way.

Additionally, Horowitz said, "we successfully negotiated the removal of an unprecedented gag provision that would have barred the release of any information on why the (blowout preventer) failed," Horowitz said. "We also achieved the removal of language that would have exposed parties who disagreed with the joint investigation team to potential charges of federal obstruction."

Tags: BOEMRE, CSB, Deepwater Horizon disaster, joint investigation

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Scot Fahey

November 13, 2010, 3:44 PM

muts fighting over federal funding.They must know the GOP budget cuts are in route.
Typical Feuding Federal Agenices, and no one to act as a ref.
The Chem safety board????

Bruce

November 13, 2010, 3:49 PM

Sure sounds to me like Obama and his people wanted to keep everybody else out so they could make the findings come out the way they wanted.

Spill tally so far: BP has paid more than $500 million

Friday, November 12, 2010 at 4:10 PM by Bloomberg in **General**, **Gulf oil disaster**, **clean-up costs**

By Jim Snyder
Bloomberg News

BP Plc has paid the U.S. $518 million for clean-up and other efforts related to its Gulf of Mexico oil spill, congressional auditors said.

The Government Accountability Office released a report today reviewing the financial risks facing the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund, which Congress authorized in 1990 — after the Exxon Valdez incident — to pay the immediate expenses of federal agencies responding to spills. An 8-cents-per-barrel petroleum tax finances the fund.

While more than $1.6 billion remained in the fund as of the end of September, disbursements for one incident can't exceed $1 billion by law, even if oil companies reimburse the government for the costs, according to the GAO.

The GAO report shows that federal and state agencies have spent $581 million so far on cleanup and restoration of natural resources damaged by the spill, triggered by the April 20 blowout on the BP-leased Deepwater Horizon drilling rig.

The fund is "at risk" of reaching the limit on total expenditures for the BP spill in the "relatively near future," the GAO said.

The U.S. has asked for reimbursement from companies deemed to be responsible parties for spills. BP had paid the U.S. $518.4 million as of Oct. 12, according to the GAO report.

SEE ALSO:

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Feinberg's firm made $2.5 million from BP in 3 1/2 months

BP says oil spill compensation payout rate soars

Congress is considering legislation to lift the $1 billion restriction. The GAO recommended a more elastic cap in which the money reimbursed by oil companies is not counted against the limit.

Senator Tom Carper, a Delaware Democrat, said in an e-mail today that "it is unlikely that the current cap of $1 billion will sustain the eventual cost of this monumental clean-up and recovery effort."

'Common-sense Approach'

Carper, chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee's panel on federal financial management, called the GAO's recommendation a "workable, common-sense approach."

The federal oil-spill fund is separate from the Gulf Coast Claims Facility, the entity run by lawyer Kenneth Feinberg to compensate people and businesses hurt by the spill. BP said it will dedicate $20 billion to that program.

The U.S. Coast Guard has identified BP, Transocean Ltd., which operated the drilling rig, and Anadarko Petroleum Corp. and MOEX Offshore 2007 LLC, part owners of the ruptured well, as responsible parties and therefore potentially required to reimburse the government for its spill costs. So far, BP is the only company that has paid.

The GAO report was requested by Carper; Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, a Rhode Island Democrat; Democratic Representatives John Conyers of Michigan and Nick Rahall of West Virginia; and Michael Burgess, a Texas Republican.

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THE SOLAR HOME & BUSINESS JOURNAL

November 15, 2010

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San Antonio Utility's Sustainability Report Sets a Path Toward Renewables

Published Nov. 14, 2010

CPS Energy, the large municipally owned utility company covering the San Antonio area, has released its first Corporate Sustainability Report, which outlines plans to develop more solar and other renewable forms of electricity.

The report notes that the company has served the fast-growing San Antonio region for 150 years, and that its customers' utility bills have been among the lowest of the nation's largest cities.

"However, to continue this great tradition of economic viability we must look into the future rather than admiring our past," a summary of the report says. "The challenges of aging infrastructure and increasing environmental concerns have the potential to significantly increase the costs of energy from fossil fuel generation. Multiple indicators reveal that the current path is not sustainable."

The report says that although climate issues are creating "a challenging time for CPS Energy and others in the energy industry, it also presents us with huge opportunities for innovation and growth. Rather than lamenting change, we embrace this opportunity to contribute to an emerging era of new fuel sources, new business models, and new jobs."

CPS Energy now generates about 38 percent of its electricity from nuclear fuel, another 38 percent from coal-fired plants, and 17 percent from turbine-generators fueled by natural gas or oil. Most of its baseload power comes from coal and nuclear plants, which "cannot be instantaneously turned on and are not built to be cycled frequently," the report notes. The utility is a part-owner of the 1,088-megawatt South Texas Project in Bay City, Texas, a two-reactor nuclear complex. CPS Energy has invested in expansion of the nuclear complex that would add 200 megawatts of nuclear capacity to its energy mix.

Natural gas is used by CPS Energy for both baseload capacity and for peaking load, because it can be increased rapidly to match rising demand.

"This is especially helpful during hot summer peak days in Texas or to help compensate for fluctuations in the output from our sizeable wind generation portfolio," the utility's summary report says.

About 7 percent of CPS Energy's portfolio mix in 2009 came from renewable energy sources. The utility recently celebrated the completion of one of the country's largest solar photovoltaic installations, the 14-megawatt Blue Wing Solar Project.

CPS Energy, which now has a total of 44 megawatts of solar production capacity under contract, plans to generate 20 percent of its power by 2020 from renewable sources, including 100 megawatts from non-wind installations.

"There is a need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and CPS Energy is committed to being a part of the solution," the utility's summary report says. "Our plan is to transform ourselves from a company focused on providing low-cost power based on traditional generation sources to a company providing competitively priced power from a variety of sustainable sources."

Earlier this year CPS Energy began a pilot program called Solartricity, under which owners of solar installations rated at 25 to 500 kilowatts of capacity are paid 27 cents per kilowatt-hour for the electricity they produce for 20 years. The program is similar to highly successful European feed-in tariff programs that pay solar owners for generation, but so far it excludes those with smaller systems.

The two-year pilot program, which was fully subscribed for 2010, calls for the installation of 10 megawatts of total capacity, or 5 megawatts per year.

“CPS Energy has embraced solar as part of a long-term transition to distributed generation,” the utility’s website says, adding that “Distributed generation refers to the production of electricity by those with solar, wind and other renewable-energy systems scattered throughout the CPS Energy grid.”

CPS Energy, which has about 700,000 electricity customers, says that it is the country's largest municipally owned utility company providing both electricity and natural gas service.

“This report documents for the public our commitment and path toward sustainability for our community,” said Cris Eugster, executive vice president and chief sustainability officer for CPS Energy.

statesman.com

City-owned utility to boost spending on electric car infrastructure

Austin Energy could spend as much as $28 million over next five years.

By **Asher Price**
AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Updated: 12:44 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 13, 2010
Published: 10:44 p.m. Friday, Nov. 12, 2010

Austin Energy could invest as much as $28 million during the next five years on public charging equipment and promotion for electric cars.

The investment mirrors efforts by utilities across the state to elbow their way into the American transportation energy market. In effect, the power generating companies want to displace gasoline from a pump with electricity from a plug.

Austin officials say as many as 190,000 electric-powered cars, including plug-in hybrids, could be rolling around Austin in a decade. Other studies suggest that figure is optimistic, but whatever the number, the utility officials want to make the possibility a reality.

"We expect to get a lot of new revenue off that $28 million investment," said Karl Rábago, vice president for distributed energy services at the city-owned utility.

Beyond a business decision, the utility couches the electric car money as an environmental and security effort.

"Any revenue we make comes at the expense of the oil industry," Rábago said. "I want to keep our money in the community. I don't want to send it to Yemen or Saudi Arabia or Venezuela."

Thus far, oil companies have largely stayed mum as utilities take baby steps to expand into their market.

To promote electric vehicle use and to test charging stations, the utility is using federal money to buy a pair of Chevrolet Volts and 14 Dodge Ram trucks, all with electric capabilities.

Utility officials also forecast spending $28 million, mostly between 2012 and 2015, to pay for 100 to 200 charging stations and infrastructure development such as the updating of small, pole-top transformers to handle increased demand.

The effort, which would immediately benefit wealthier Austinites willing to pay for electric cars as a second or third vehicle, could be a tough sell as the utility embarks on a broad rate increase. (The Chevrolet Volt, which also has a modest gas engine, costs $41,000; the all-electric Nissan Leaf costs $32,780.)

But Rábago said the investment is the same "as investing in economic development of any kind."

Utility officials say they will place the charging stations around Austin, with the first ones appearing by the end of 2011. Already, a sample one is at the Whole Foods Market on Lamar Boulevard.

They will situate the chargers to tamp down what Rábago calls "range anxiety," the worry by potential consumers that they will not be able to find charging stations to power up their cars. The Volt will go as far as 50 miles on a charge, with a total range of more than 300 miles when gas is used; the Leaf's range is 47 miles to 138 miles, depending on driving conditions.

The utility also has to plan for the amped-up electricity demand in higher-income neighborhoods in which the cars are likely to be found: Filling a charging car can double the energy demand of a conventional house, so the utility will have to change equipment on its lines and poles to handle the load.

Utility officials also are considering ways to promote vehicle charging at night, when off-peak wind energy is at its strongest.

The utility says filling up with a plug from its sources of electricity — a combination that is primarily natural gas, along with coal and nuclear power, plus some renewables — will lead to lower emissions than filling up with gas, cutting smog-forming nitrogen oxides by 95 percent and carbon dioxide by 54 percent.

But money, more than the environment, appears to be the sort of green that is driving utilities to back the project.

The efforts have led to unusual partnerships. In the last legislative session, the Sierra Club and the Association of Electric Companies of Texas testified in favor of a bill promoting alternative methods of fueling vehicles.

How quickly electric vehicles are ready for the mass market remains an open question, despite Austin Energy's bullishness.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration's 2010 Energy Outlook forecasts that nationally in 2020 there will be roughly a million electric hybrid vehicles.

An October report by J.D. Power and Associates estimated that 100,000 all-electric vehicles will be sold in the United States in 2020 and 1.7 million plug-in hybrid electrics overall.

Austin Energy spokesman Ed Clark said how much of the $28 million actually gets spent depends on how many electric-powered vehicles are operating in Austin.

Right now there are only about a dozen plug-in electric vehicles , according to Austin Energy's estimates.

Meanwhile, utilities are rolling out similar charging systems in other parts of Texas.

"By moving all the gasoline BTUs to electric kilowatts, obviously the electric industry does gain," said Arun Banksota, president of NRG Texas' EV Services, a division with 15 full-time employees established less than a year ago.

His company is about to roll out chargers in the Houston area, with monthly pricing plans for charging up at places as diverse as a home or a local drugstore.

"In order for electric vehicles to take off, it's almost like a chicken and egg problem," he said. "It's like asking what came first, the internal combustion engine or gasoline stations. It's necessary for us to invest in charging stations to spur the adoption of electric vehicles."

During September's Texas State Fair, TXU Energy said it would pay for at least a dozen charging stations in Fort Worth and Dallas. The company says charging an electric vehicle will be cheaper than filling up with gas, comparable with paying about 75 cents per gallon of gasoline.

And in San Antonio, the publicly owned utility and the city have collaborated to place nearly a dozen electric car charging stations in public garages and at the airport.

That city is focusing on promoting at-home charging through rebates, said Bill Baker, an analyst in San Antonio's office of environmental policy.

"We know people want overwhelmingly to charge at home," he said.

Brewster McCracken, the executive director of Austin's Pecan Street Project, a research and development nonprofit examining smart-grid technology, agreed that electric car owners are much more likely to want to power up at home because filling up typically takes several hours.

"Electricity is a lot cheaper than gasoline, but there are significant barriers with infrastructure till mass adoption," he said.

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SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN.com

Los Alamos scientists develop sensors, simulators that could make turbines energy-efficient, wallet-friendly for wind farmers

By Emily Hubbell | The New Mexican

11/12/2010

When a turbine blade breaks, it's no easy fix.

Just ask the wind-farm owner who has to front the $250,000-plus price tag for bringing in the crane — and has to shell out the additional bucks to fix or replace the blade.

That's just one hurdle that keeps wind energy trailing coal in cost-effectiveness. Right now, wind costs about 5 to 8 cents per kilowatt-hour, while you can get a kilowatt-hour of coal power for about half that price.

The Department of Energy's goal is to close that cost gap and increase wind power by 20 percent over the next 20 years. But Washington, D.C., isn't the only place where people are getting serious about alternative energy — a team of interdisciplinary scientists at Los Alamos National Laboratory is leading a project that could help make turbines more affordable and efficient for wind-farm owners.

"The bottom line is, we'll reduce the cost of wind energy by making turbines more reliable," said Balakumar "B.J." Balasubramaniam, a team member from the lab's physics division.

It's all in the blade

The team's research focuses on turbine blades — hollow, paddle-shaped structures still handmade by layering sheets of glass fabric and reinforcing that composite with balsa wood inserts. Blades can be anywhere from 1 meter to more than 40 meters long, and on horizontal-axis turbines, there are three of them attached to a center point called the nacelle.

The researchers want to get to the bottom of three issues: How and why do blades fail? How should turbines be positioned to maximize energy? And how can we make simulations to help keep wind farms running in severe weather?

To investigate turbine failure, two team members — Kevin Farinholt and Gyu Hae Park — are developing sensors to monitor the health of a blade. The devices are mere inches wide — minuscule compared to the length of the blade on which they're attached — but they pack a punch. Sending signals across the length of the blade, the sensors pick up on changes from the blade's normal state to determine when and where cracks are forming.

The technology also allows the operator to analyze the health of the sensor itself, so that a broken sensor isn't mistaken for a damaged blade.

Park said the team's goal is to keep the cost of the sensors affordable for wind farmers. The scientists are designing the sensors to cost a couple of dollars each and the sensory node to run about a few hundred dollars.

"The turbine owner doesn't want to invest a million dollars to design a sensing system," he said. "So a challenge we have is to develop the sensing system at a very low cost."

A sensor system like the one they're creating could alert wind farmers that a few blades will break in the near future, so that they can wait to call the crane until all those blades need to be fixed. That's more wallet-friendly than paying each time a single blade fails.

But the cost of wind energy isn't all about cracks and cranes. Another key to trimming the price tag is knowing how to harness the most energy possible from the turbines. To investigate this, the team is checking out how wind hits the blades.

Using a technique that analyzes hundreds of tiny points in a wind field, Balasubramaniam can track the direction, force and velocity of the wind that's moving across a blade.

The technique helps the scientists see how the output of one turbine — its wake — affects the ability of the next one down the line to create energy. It can also determine how repeated turbulence affects the blade's strength over time.

That data will help validate a supercomputer simulation the team is developing to model how turbines interact with the atmosphere — in this case, the wind. The computer code can calculate the energy output based on the distance between turbines, said Rod Linn, who is heading that portion of the project.

"The idea there is that we can look at one turbine, two turbines, three turbines — what are the turbines doing to each other?" Linn said.

That could translate into better guidelines for wind farmers trying to position their turbines in a way that makes the most energy — and money — sense. It could also mean a better understanding of how to handle severe wind conditions on a wind farm.

Out at the farm

The next step is to get out in the field to test the sensors, the simulations and the other research the team has compiled, Balasubramaniam said.

In the upcoming months, the team will observe three different-sized turbines in three locations — a 4.5-meter diameter turbine installed near the lab; a 0.2-to-0.4-meter diameter turbine in New Mexico State University's wind-tunnel facility; and a 20-meter diameter turbine at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Bushland test facility in Texas.

They're hoping these experiments will validate their models, help perfect their sensors and bring new light to the way turbines work.

The three-year research project, led by principal investigator Curtt Ammerman, is funded by LANL and the U.S. Department of Energy. The team is collaborating with Sandia National Laboratories on the research.

I-Team: Radiation in Houston's tap water, long history of contamination

by Mark Greenblatt/Chief Investigative Reporter

Part three of an ongoing series.

Posted on November 15, 2010 at 10:02 PM

Updated yesterday at 1:02 AM

HOUSTON-- The City of Houston is one of the only major cities in Texas with radioactive elements, like uranium and radium, present in its drinking water, according to data provided by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and internal City of Houston e-mails.

The elements, which emit something known as alpha radiation, are not present in detectable amounts in Dallas, Arlington, Austin, Beaumont, San Antonio, or many other major cities in Texas.

Small amounts of radioactive elements have contaminated Houston's water supply going back for as many years as the city keeps records on hand, which is presently for tests performed as far back as 1996. The problem appears to be isolated to the city's groundwater wells, which provide more than 70 million gallons a day of drinking water for Houston. Some neighborhoods in Houston depend entirely on groundwater wells, while the majority of the city depends on water that is a mixture of surface water and groundwater.

Surface water sources, which include rivers and lakes, have not been found to contain radiation. City officials say the "mix," the majority of Houston depends on, delivers about 81 percent surface water and 19 percent groundwater on average.

The Department of Public Works says it has records of 78 water samples, collected

by state officials since 2004, for regulatory purposes. The four samples that came from surface water sources were "non-detect" for radiation. However, the vast majority of ground wells contained at least some alpha radiation. Six of the 78 samples contained so much they were "above the 15 (picocuries per liter)" legal limit set by the EPA for alpha radiation in water.

KHOU has learned the United States Geological Survey, a federal agency that does not regulate contaminants in drinking water (but assists in determining potential geological conditions that lead to contamination), has been conducting its own study of radiation in Houston's water. The results of that study have not yet been made public, but internal e-mails written between public works employees suggest the federal study may have detected a much larger share of Houston wells testing above the federal legal limits for radiation, compared to what state regulators found. One e-mail, written on Oct. 12th 2010 from one public works employee to top staff members of the water-quality division, says that the USGS study found "10 out of 68 wells contain alpha particles higher than or equal to (the federal legal limit)."

Dr. Joshua Hamilton, a toxicologist who has a specialty in drinking water, says there is no safe amount of alpha radiation, even if the radiation is below that federal legal limit.

"This particle is highly energized, and it's coming in at high velocity. If DNA is in its path it will basically attack the DNA," he said.

Hamilton is the Chief Academic and Scientific Officer at the Marine Biological Laboratory in Massachusetts and he received his PhD from Cornell University in New York. He previously taught as a professor with tenure at Dartmouth Medical College, and has been a visiting scientist at Harvard. He was also the director of the Center for Environmental Health Sciences at Dartmouth.

Hamilton says attacks on your DNA by any amount of alpha radiation can lead to mutations, which can produce "wild cells." The EPA has stated in its 2000 rule for regulating radiation in water that, "a single ''wild'' cell can give rise to a cancer. For alpha particles, it has been shown experimentally that a single alpha passing through a cell is sufficient to induce a mutational event."

Hamilton says that is why the federally-recognized 'public health goal' (called a Maximum Contaminant Limit Goal) is "zero" for alpha radiation. That number is set by the Environmental Protection Agency and is listed in the federal register of

the United States government. The reason for the goal is because alpha radiation is a known "class A" carcinogen.

The "legal" limit for radiation (called a Maximum Contaminant Limit), however, is set above zero and at various limits depending on what radioactive element is present in the water. Hamilton says your risks still increase for cancer when any amount is present, even if the amount is below the "legal" limit or if your water utility tells you they still meet all "legal" standards.

"One alpha particle, if it hits DNA in the right place, can cause a change which leads to a mutation," he says. "Every increase in hits increases the likelihood that one of those will cause a mutation that leads to cancer."

However, there is some good news to report about Houston's water: It has never been cited for a federal violation of the "legal" limits for radiation. In order to get a violation, the city is judged on the "running annual average" reading it receives for tests of its wells, not on individual tests performed at individual water well locations.

City spokesperson Alvin Wright released a written statement to KHOU claiming that "we have not detected ... any reason for concern based on the levels detected."

A read through **internal city emails and documents**, released to KHOU after we filed a request using the Texas Public Information Act, reveals a different story.

One **internal e-mail** from Oct. 13, 2010 from a city analyst to public works water division employees Kira Smith and Bruce Kao states, "Jersey Village, Spring Branch, and Southwest are areas that have alpha particle and uranium concern."

Another email written from the same analyst follows up on the same day to name Bellaire as "one more area we need to watch out."
The documents also reveal how, after KHOU began asking questions about radiation in water, the city began running various models and scientific studies on radiation in its water.

For one neighborhood near the Southwest side of Houston, called Chasewood, city staff ran one scientific model they called a "worst case scenario" which studied the amount of radiation residents there were exposed to during high-demand periods.

Internal city documents show that Chasewood water tested at, or above the

legal limit for alpha radiation all three times it was tested dating back to 2004. Chasewood, according to those documents, has three different groundwater pumps. One e-mail written on Oct. 20, 2010 to public works supervisor Bruce Kao notes that the "Model showed that Chasewood water reaches out a fairly large area even when one pump is on."

Early models the city ran in October predicted only a limited amount of hours each day that groundwater with high radiation readings would flow to the area, predicting surface water that contained zero radiation would quickly flow to the neighborhood. An **e-mail** sent on Oct. 21, 2010 from Public Works employee Yu Cang to Mr. Kao noted: "After our phone conversation, I went back and reviewed the model ... after the plant is shut off; it takes about 5 hours for the affected area to shrink half and 10 hours for the affected area ... to be gone. The surface water does not come into the area as soon as I (was) expected after the plant is shut off."

Soon after that **email**, KHOU has learned, top city leaders made the decision to shut off the Chasewood well altogether.

What are the risks?

The TCEQ has identified Harris County as one of "several areas of Texas (with) elevated radionuclide levels." Houston, itself however, is not in violation of legal limits for radionuclides.

KHOU asked Boston University professor and drinking water specialist David Ozonoff to help us understand the risks to drinking from Houston tap water where radionuclides are present in measurable amounts. Ozonoff is the Chair Emeritus of B.U.'s School of Public Health. He is also on the Massachusetts Cancer Advisory Committee.

KHOU: Some people may say the risks won't lead to cancer all that often. What would you tell them?

OZONOFF: You're involuntarily buying a lottery ticket of which winning is the wrong thing.

KHOU: If you keep playing, the odds go up?

OZONOFF: If you keep playing, your odds go up and the more tickets you buy the more your odds go up.

Ozonoff says just like the real lottery, having low odds does not mean someone does not win.

OZONOFF: If it's one in 10,000, if there are one million people in the water supply or two million people in the water supply, then somewhere around 100 or 200 people are winning that lottery.

Ozonoff says city officials should strive to join other major Texas cities, which have no detectable amounts of alpha radiation in their water. He also encourages them to limit alpha radiation where the city can determine a lot of it is coming from, whether or not the sources exceed federal legal limits.

How does Houston compare to other cities?

The Environmental Working Group, a national science-based public-interest organization, recently studied the water quality of 100 major U.S. cities. It ranked Houston near the very bottom, 95th out of 100, which meant Houston was named one of the "Lowest Rated Utilities" in America by EWG.

We asked them why Houston received such a low ranking, and the organization mentioned radioactive alpha particles as one primary reason.

The City of Houston has said the EWG report is unfair, saying large cities test more for radiation and will therefore find more.

A KHOU analysis of internal city documents reveals the city is aware the following cities had no known amounts of alpha radiation in 2009: New York, San Diego, Dallas, San Jose, Detroit, San Francisco, Jacksonville, Indianapolis, Austin, Columbus, Fort Worth, Memphis, Boston, Seattle, Nashville, Milwaukee, Portland, New Orleans, and Corpus Christi.

Internal documents in the city's possession cite the following cities as having some amounts of alpha radiation in 2009 above the limits of detection the EPA recognizes: Los Angeles, Chicago, Phoenix, Charlotte, Denver, El Paso, Las Vegas, and Riverside California.

Those same documents record Houston as having the single highest individual test for alpha radiation in 2009 for any large city in the United States. That recording was taken in the Chasewood neighborhood.

KHOU intended to ask Mayor Annise Parker about Chasewood during a 10-minute interview to which the Mayor agreed. We also informed the Mayor's staff we had planned to ask about what solutions she might implement for other neighborhoods mentioned in the city's internal e-mails. However, her staff cancelled that interview after KHOU's first report in this series aired.

The Mayor sent a **written statement** instead, which is posted in its entirety here in conjunction with this story.

What the City Could Do

The City of Houston is not required to do anything about radiation readings at any location in its water system, even though its own employees have identified some neighborhood wells as of "concern", because Houston's overall system is not in violation of federal legal limits. Violations, as noted previously, are not given out for individual test results (or even for averages of results at specific locations) but rather are based on the average radiation scores the entire system receives.

In addition, city officials say attempting to install filtration systems that could remove the vast majority of radiation would be expensive.
The reason? Houston's "main" water system has radioactive groundwater wells scattered all across the city. The city also has some smaller, stand-alone systems which rely solely on groundwater. The water from these stand-alone systems is not purified in a central location.

However, after reviewing the city's internal e-mails, Dr. Hamilton and Dr. David Ozonoff, both say the city should still take more action to limit radiation in the hot spots it has already identified internally. Hamilton and Ozonoff cite health risks that still exist even when the city is not in violation of legal limits. They are also not the only scientists who believe risks still exist.

"Any contamination above (zero) will produce an increase in cancer risk, even if the level is below the (federal legal limit)," **Dr. Arjun Makhijani said**. Makhijani is a recognized expert on energy and radiation science and leads the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research just outside Washington D.C. Makhijani did not review Houston specific information in detail and made his **comments** on the basis of general scientific principles.

"There is no safe level of radiation dose, according to the best available science.

This is the basis of all radiation protection regulation, including that of the EPA," he said.

KHOU has learned that members of the mayor's staff contacted Dr. Joshua Hamilton, who recommended the City take further action than just at Chasewood. He says any area identified as pumping a significant amount of radioactive water (either in overall volume or overall radiation readings) should either be shut down or have some kind of filtration system installed at those individual locations. Implementing the suggestion at individual locations would not be without precedent in Houston, which has not always implemented the same water treatment upgrades at all of its facilities.

Hamilton says that he offered a number of engineering solutions the city could implement. He and Ozonoff agree that by taking care of those high radiation locations named in city e-mails such as Bellaire, Spring Branch, Southwest, etc. it might help substantially reduce the overall number of "lottery tickets" pumped into Houston's water. When those "tickets" get pumped into the water, they are mixed with and pollute otherwise radiation-free surface water.

In addition, the city's own staff told KHOU that certain engineering measures could be implemented to clean out the radiation, which does not respond to normal chlorination. City officials confirm that none of the following possibilities are currently in place at any locations throughout Houston:

Treatment Technologies for Removing Radionuclides from Drinking Water (as provided by the City of Houston to KHOU)

Below is a summary of the more common treatment technologies for the removal of various radionuclides from water. Most of these are on EPA's list of Best Available Technologies for compliance with the Radionuclides Rule.

- Ion exchange (for removal of uranium, radium, and polonium)
- Reverse osmosis (for removal of uranium, thorium, radium, and polonium)
- Lime softening (for removal of hardness, radium, and uranium)
- Green sand filtration (for removal of radium)
- Co-precipitation with barium sulfate (for removal of radium)

- Air stripping (for removal of radon)
- Granular activated carbon (for removal of radon, uranium, radium, lead, and polonium)
- Electrodialysis/electrodialysis reversal
- Pre-formed hydrous manganese oxide filtration (for iron, manganese, and radium)
- Activated alumina
- Enhanced coagulation/filtration (for iron, uranium, and polonium)
- Nanofiltration (for removal of uranium, radium, lead, and polonium)

Add another comment

Erin Brockovich returns to address residents affected by chromium contamination

Posted: Monday, November 15, 2010 8:00 pm | Updated: 10:06 pm, Mon Nov 15, 2010.

Kathleen Thurber

Midland Reporter-Telegram |

More than a year after her first visit to Midland, environmental activist Erin Brockovich will return Thursday to address those affected by chromium contamination in south Midland County.

Hexavalent chromium was first discovered in April of 2009 at more than 50 times the acceptable federal levels in a water well near West County Road 112.

Brockovich visited Midland in June of 2009 to speak with residents and said then the water she found in Midland County was eerily similar to the water in the Hinkley, Calif., case that made her famous. A movie starring Julia Roberts was released in 2000 based on Brockovich's investigation of the site.

She will speak at 7 p.m. Thursday at the Midland Center, 105 North Main St.

Bob Bowcock, an environmental investigator who works with Brockovich, has visited Midland several times since her 2009 stop in an effort to define the plume of contamination and identify a source.

At the same time, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality has been testing wells in the area and providing filters to residents whose water tests above the acceptable levels. The state agency submitted this fall an application for the site to be added to the Environmental Protection Agency's National Priorities List.

The EPA is collecting samples from private water wells this month as well as drilling additional monitoring wells in the area while the TCEQ continues providing filters, the EPA's project manager for the site, Vincent Malott, has said. If added to the National Priorities List, the EPA will take the lead on investigation and remediation of the contaminant at the site.

The EPA will continue taking public comments on the application through Dec. 20 and the site could be added to the list as early as March or April, Region 6 NPL Coordinator Brenda Cook has said.

The first water sample tested in 2009 contained more than 5 milligrams of hexavalent chromium per liter. The acceptable level of chromium set by the EPA is 0.1 milligrams per liter.

Since, more than 230 wells have been tested and 46 wells have been identified as containing concentrations of chromium levels that are unsafe.

At high levels, hexavalent chromium can lead to cancer anemia, an inflamed liver, skin irritation and gastrointestinal issues, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. TCEQ officials have said the levels discovered in Midland County are not high enough to cause cancer, though some residents say they disagree.

In its report submitted to the EPA, the TCEQ said there wasn't "adequate documentation" to attribute the source of the chromium to one or more of the potential source areas identified.

Bowcock had told residents his research showed the contamination likely came from a Schlumberger site near the plume.

However, the TCEQ's document reported the Ogallala aquifer "was impacted with chromium at the B&W facility, but not at the Schlumberger Technology Corporation facility or the Williamson Gravel Pit." It also reported the chromium concentrations increase in the

aquifer in a down-gradient manner starting at the B&W facility, though it said the evidence documented wasn't enough to conclusively identify the facility as a point of release for the chromium, according to the report.

Kathleen Thurber can be reached at kthurber@mrt.com.

Brockovich meeting:

7 p.m. Thursday

Midland Center, 105 North Main St.

To submit a public comment to the EPA:

http://www.epa.gov/superfund/sites/npl/pubcom.htm

Deadline for comments is Dec. 20.

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Herbicides and Their Dangers

Nov 13, 2010 Trina Council

Herbicides are chemicals used to kill weeds and unwanted plants. Most people are unaware of the dangers they pose, which are many.

Professional farmers and vegetable gardeners commonly use herbicides to rid their crops of unwanted plants and weeds. The USDA studied thousands of samples of fruits and vegetables available for purchase in 1995 and detected the residue of more than 65 pesticides.

Atrazine

Atrazine is a common agricultural pesticide used in the United States. The National Toxicology Program states that atrazine is immunotoxic and can damage the immune system. An example of immune system disruption is decreased production of interferon, a molecule that fights viral infection in those exposed to the chemical. Exposure to atrazine also disrupts hormone systems in humans and animals. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln conducted a study in 2000 which tested birth defect rates in an Iowa community with higher than normal levels of ATrazine in the water supply. The study concluded more birth defects occured as a result of the chemical leaching into the water supply.

2,4-D

The herbicide 2,4-D is the oldest herbicide used in the U.S. It was develped during World War II and became one of the primary ingredients in the herbicide, Agent Orange. Agent Orange was sprayed on Vietnamese crops during the Vietnam conflict. At least 500,000 children were born with deformities after their mothers were exposed to contaminated crops while pregnant with them. 2,4-D has been manufactured using a process that does not produce dioxins since the early 1980s, which is one of the most dangerous compounds in the herbicide. It is still harmful and activists are attempting to get it removed from the market.

Dacthal

Dimethyl tetrachloroterephthalate, commonly known as dacthal, is an herbicide used to control crab grasses and weeds in residential flower gardens, retail nurseries, and commercial fruit and vegetable crops. It has been used in the United States since 1958, but the EPA testing is either incomplete or not valid. Despite this, the EPA used incomplete tests them as examples of acceptable exposure levels.

Glyphosate

Glyphosate-based herbicides are the most common herbicides used in the U.S. The chemical was originally marketed in 1974 and its market has increased since genetically-modified crops were introduced that are designed to tolerate the chemical. Roundup, a brand produced by Monsanto, is one of many glyphosate-based herbicides available on the market today.

City seeks reality show participants

Channel 6 to showcase families cutting back waste

Updated: Monday, 15 Nov 2010, 2:57 PM CST
Published : Monday, 15 Nov 2010, 2:57 PM CST

AUSTIN (KXAN) - In honor of America Recycles Day, the City of Austin's Solid Waste Services Department announced Monday the search for four Austin families to participate in a new reality-show style competition called "Dare to Go Zero."

Tasked with going Zero Waste, the selected families will learn how to reduce the amount of waste they generate while participating in challenges throughout a five-week period. The family with the largest percentage of "waste loss" will be the winner and will receive a grand prize. The grand prize and selection of families will be announced in January 2011.

The families will be filmed for a five-week period, and episodes will air on the City's Channel 6 and YouTube channels.

"This is a great chance for Austinites to learn from other Austinites. Dare to Go Zero will allow people to see how to put Zero Waste ideas into practice and truly reduce their waste stream," said Bob Gedert, SWS Director. "It's also a fun way for us to help educate people about going beyond reducing, reusing and recycling. The three Rs aren't enough anymore. People must also rethink, and Dare to Go Zero will be a great way to highlight innovative ideas."

SWS is looking for families who represent Austin's diverse population. A family could be one with parents and children, a single parent home, a group of students living together or a multigenerational family.

Participants must be City of Austin garbage customers and cannot be City employees or related to a City employee.

Filming of the Dare to Go Zero challenge will occur in January and February 2011, and the show will air in March and April 2011, with the winning family announced on Earth Day, April 22, 2011.

Information about the Dare to Go Zero challenge is available at austinrecycles.com. Applications will be available on the website, at any City of Austin Public Library, or by calling 3-1-1 and are due by Dec.17, 2010, at 5 p.m.

About Zero Waste

In 2009, Austin City Council passed Texas' first Zero Waste Plan. The City of Austin is committed to reducing the amount of waste sent to area landfills by 90 percent by 2040.

About America Recycles Day

Since 1997, communities across the country have come together on Nov. 15 to celebrate America Recycles Day. More than a celebration, America Recycles Day is the only nationally recognized day dedicated to the promotion of recycling programs in the United States. One day to inform and educate. One day to get our neighbors, friends and community leaders excited about what can be accomplished when we all work together. One day to make recycling bigger and better 365 days a year.